

INTRODUCTION

The Study, the Crisis, and the Essays

Crisis: a time of intense difficulty, trouble, or danger. Certainly 2020 is such a year—a year of crisis.

In March of 2020, thousands of teachers, professors, trainers, and administrators were told to teach, train, and work from home, and millions of children, teenagers, college students, and employees were required to learn and work from home. A global pandemic was sweeping across the world, caused by a new, novel virus called COVID-19.

An examination of the pandemic is not the purpose of this paper. Rather, the impact of the closing and changing of education and training because of the virus is the phenomenon being studied.

There were many concerns expressed, but most in the education professions agreed that an educational crisis was beginning, and this crisis was going to continue for months, even years. It was decided that it was important to capture events as they occurred—and a longitudinal study was begun to document the role instructional technology was playing as organizations attempted to evolve to react to events caused by the crisis—the study was to use journaling to develop essays to explain the role of instructional technology in a time of crisis.

The Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) is widely considered to be the premiere professional organization for those in the field of instruc-

tional technology. AECT defines educational technology as:

The study and ethical practice of facilitating learning and improving performance by creating, using, and managing appropriate technology processes and resources. (Januszewski & Molenda, 2008)

In this paper, educational technology and instructional technology will be used interchangeably.

AECT leaders were contacted and agreed to announce a new study involving its members. The study “instructional technology in a time of crisis” was proposed. The study’s purpose was to ask those involved with instructional technology to participate in an ongoing examination of the role instructional technology was playing in organizations that were dealing with the global pandemic brought about by the COVID-19 virus.

The following invitation was sent to members of AECT in early April 2020.

We invite you to participate in a major case-study effort. For the next several months, we are inviting AECTers to participate in a multicase study research project. We would like individuals or institutional group members to keep a *journal* of the events in their organization, school, or college related to the response to the coronavirus outbreak that involves instructional technology, including online/

distance learning and telehealth efforts. Specifically, we would like AECT members to *start a journal and regularly make notations* related to these research questions:

- How are schools, colleges, and organizations managing the mandate to rapidly teach, consult, train, and learn from home?
- What specific actions are being taken?
- Who are taking the lead in the organization to guide the move from traditional education and training to online education, training, and consulting?
- What barriers have been encountered?
- What worked, and what did not?
- How is this phenomenon being experienced by individuals in the organization?
- Are there telehealth and telemedicine applications of instructional technology success stories.

We are especially interested in your, or your group's, personal observations, not the official communications from your organization. When the crisis is over, or abates, we will ask you to transcribe your journal into a short, but specific, essay—a personal report on the response to the crisis. Naturally, if you prefer there will be no reference to the name of the organization, but please describe the type, size, geographical location of the organization that was the subject of your essay. In addition, please collect any artifact *that stood out for you* for various reasons—because it was unexpected, extremely helpful, funny, useless, caused unnecessary anxiety—related to your institution's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was hoped that dozens of AECT members would participate. Within weeks, 45 responses were received indicating willingness to participate in the “crisis study.” These 45 were sent information reminding them of the purpose of the study, and regular correspondence was sent to them supporting their journal-keeping efforts. The study participants became essayists who were asked to be commentators and critics.

In midsummer, a short survey was sent to the initial group of study participants. Twenty-

six responses were returned. When essays were collected in November, each essayist was asked to complete this survey, if they had not done so in July.

In early November 2020, a decision was made that it was a point at which enough had transpired related to the study's research questions, and that essays should be collected. The following email was sent to crisis study participants.

Hello Study Partner—It is time! We have received approval from the editors and editorial board of the *Quarterly Review of Distance Education* to dedicate the next issue of this prestigious journal to our study. We would like you to review your notes and submit your paper to be included as part of this issue of the journal. The issue will begin with a description of the scope of the study and will conclude with a summary of general results.

Here is the format we suggest:

- Title—6–10 words;
- Abstract—approximately 100 words;
- First sentence—a dramatic and encompassing first sentence of about 10–12 words;
- Organization—describe the organization being observed—in generic terms;
- Base line/starting point—an overview of the role of instructional technology prior to the first impact of the pandemic;
- Monthly summaries—a chronological review of important/interesting/critical events related to the pandemic, your organization, and instructional technology;
- Current status—a overview of where the organization is right now; and
- Final summary—3–10 bullet points of significant/important observations.

We think 1,000–2,000 words is a good target, although shorter or longer is acceptable. Pictures and graphics are encouraged also.

Let us know if you want to use a pseudonym or your real name and affiliation. We will keep confidential records.

Thirteen essays were submitted from individuals and teams. Of particular interest was the international “flavor” of the submissions. A large number of organizations outside the United States submitted essays, often written by teams.

After review and copy editing, these baker’s dozen essays are included in this issue of the *Quarterly Review of Distance Education* with the title: “Essays From the Field: Instructional Technology in a Time of Crisis.”

The essays are interesting, informative, and different—revealing and insightful. This issue of the *Quarterly Review* concludes with a report of the survey results, a summary that highlights positive and questionable actions identified by our essayists, and collection of observations.

It is hoped that in times of crisis there are lessons to be learned. If a crisis is a time of trial and of decision it is important to determine the outcome of the trial and the consequences of decisions. The following essays and summary help identify what happened and, in many respects, what should happen in the future.

And finally, as the journalist Andy Gilman wrote “The secret of crisis management is not good v. bad, it is preventing bad from getting worse.”

REFERENCE

- Januszewski, A. & Molenda, M. (2008). *Educational technology: A definitions with commentary*. Erlbaum.